
100 YEARS OF THE CPGA



Greensboro Professional George Slingerland (standing left)

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The Roots of the Carolinas PGA

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As 2023 dawns, there are nearly 28,000 members of the PGA of America and more than 2,100 within the Carolinas PGA, which is the largest of 41 regional sections within the umbrella group. These dedicated golf professionals give lessons, manage golf shops, organize tournaments and in general perform a myriad of tasks to make the game enjoyable and spread the gospel of golf.

But how did they get here?

The genesis of the PGA of America dates back to January 17, 1916, when a group of golf professionals and leading amateur golfers gathered for lunch at the Taplow Club in New York City. The meeting occurred at the behest of Rodman Wanamaker, the son of the pioneering founder of Wanamaker's department stores (now Macy's). Wanamaker used his considerable wealth and influence to support a number of interests, including aviation, art and sports. He had been encouraged by Tom McNamara, an accomplished amateur golfer and a salesman for Wanamaker's business, that it was a key juncture in the

development of American golf and time to bring the club professionals under one umbrella. Wanamaker's stores were locked in a fierce battle with A.G. Spalding & Bros. in the sale of golf balls, and McNamara believed Wanamaker's support would be good publicity. They invited a group of players, including Walter Hagen and Francis Ouimet, as well as budding course architect A.W. Tillinghast, among 60 representatives of the sport to New York for an exploratory meeting.

“With golf becoming more and more popular in the United States, McNamara believed his fellow professionals could benefit from working together,” PGA historian Robert Denney wrote during the PGA's centennial celebration in 2016. “Wanamaker also believed consolidating professionals would improve their social standing, having long been treated by club members as second-class citizens.”

That meeting sparked an earnest effort to create a formal organization, and on April 10, 1916, the PGA was launched with 35 members. Wanamaker immediately donated prize money and a trophy for an annual championship, and the inaugural PGA Championship was held at Siwanoy Country Club in Bronxville, N.Y. James M. Barnes defeated Jock Hutchinson in the championship match, taking home the trophy and a purse of \$2,580.

The PGA when it was formed created seven regional sections — New England, Metropolitan, Southeastern (which included the two Carolinas), Middle States, Central, Northwestern and Pacific.

Some sources denote 1923 as the founding of the Carolinas PGA — ergo, the section's official celebration this year that will include a monthly historical feature (this is No. 1), giveaways, podcast features and a variety of other measures.

But there is also ample documentation that 1940 is the launch date of the Carolinas PGA.

Which is correct?

According to Denney, both are right. “There are, in fact, two ‘birthdays’ for the Carolinas Section,” says Denney, who worked for

nearly three decades with the PGA of America as a writer and historian and in retirement is designated as PGA Historian Emeritus.

“There was a Carolinas Section in 1923, but it was absorbed into the Mid-Atlantic Section one year later. In June 1940, a new Carolinas Section was formed.”

Little is known about that earliest Carolinas Section, though the Carolinas PGA website notes, “In May of 1923, a group of seventeen head and three assistant professionals joined hands at Greensboro Country Club and formed the Carolinas PGA Section of the Professional Golfers’ Association.”

The CPGA that exists today was founded in 1940.

The Carolinas Amateur was held that year at Mimosa Hills Country Club in Morganton, and the flagship competition of the Carolinas Golf Association, which had been founded in 1909, was the premier gathering of the best golfers and the movers-and-shakers in the Carolinas golf community. It would make sense that an important meeting within the golf industry would be held there.

This passage comes from the July 1940 edition of PGA Magazine:

“One of the great golf spots in the country has again set forth with its own PGA Section after a year of organization work by the professionals in North and South Carolina. The Carolinas Section, PGA of America, was granted recognition in June and will open their activities this summer with their own qualifying rounds for the PGA Championship with a full-fledged Carolinas PGA Championship.

“Leader in the organization work has been George Slingerland, that energetic Greensboro pro, who with the help of more than 15 other pros sold the idea to all the men in the district and finally completed the petition for charter.

“This new section will have about 25 members to start and will have a potential strength of more than 50 members through the Carolinas.”

Slingerland was elected president, and Arthur Ham of Myrtle

Beach was vice-president and Guy Paulson of Winston-Salem secretary-treasurer.

Certainly the neophyte organization was buffeted out of the door by the escalation of World War II and the United States' entry into the conflict in December 1941. But already Pinehurst, Asheville, Aiken, Camden and Charleston had established healthy golf resort communities. The first course in Myrtle Beach was soon to come. And Donald Ross by the time of his death in 1948 would have built more than four dozen courses across the Carolinas, most of them in-town country clubs in major towns from Asheville to Wilmington, from Linville to Raleigh.

The seeds were sown for meteoric growth of golf in the Carolinas and, with it, the association to serve and promote the game.



LEE PACE is a Chapel Hill-based golf writer who has written about the history, architecture and great golfers of the Carolinas over four decades. He has written more than a dozen club histories and in 2021 released along with UNC Press his book, "Good Walks--Rediscovering the Soul of Golf at 18 Top Carolinas Courses."



PGA

Carolinas Section

100 YEARS

★ 1923-2023 ★